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Mr. Burton F. Beers/
School of General Studies
North Carolina State College
Raleigh, North Carolina

Dear Mr. Beers:

During the temporary absence of Mr. Dulles, may I acknowledge and thank you most kindly for your letter of 23 January concerning the reprint of the article on Robert Lansing.

When Mr. Dulles returns to his office, I shall bring this to his attention.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Assistant to the Director

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NORTH CAROLINA STATE COLLEGE • RALEIGH

School of General Studies

Department of History and Political
Science

January 23, 1953

Mr. Allen W. Dulles
2430 E Street
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Dulles:

I am enclosing a reprint of a recently published article, "Robert Lansing's Proposed Bargain With Japan." This article is derived from my doctoral dissertation, "Robert Lansing and the Far East, 1914-1917," which I am presently revising and expanding for publication. I also have in the early stages of preparation a biography of Secretary Lansing.

During the course of my research, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and interview Miss Emma Sterling Lansing and Mrs. Katherine Gill. Both of these ladies provided invaluable information about Mr. Lansing's family, his unofficial activities and his character. I cherish the hope that you may be willing to give your own recollections of Mr. Lansing at a time when your duties are not as pressing as they are now.

Yours truly,

Burton F. Beers

Burton F. Beers,
Assistant Professor

Enclosure

Robert Lansing's Proposed Bargain with Japan

BURTON F. BEERS

[Burton F. Beers is assistant professor of history in North Carolina State College, Raleigh. This paper, which was read at a session of the Association for Asian Studies, derives from his doctoral dissertation at Duke University on Robert Lansing and the Far East, 1914-1917.]

ROBERT LANSING played a more significant role in the conduct of Far Eastern affairs than historians have suspected. Appointed in 1914 as Counselor, a position that is equivalent to the present Undersecretary of State, and in 1915 as Secretary of State, Lansing held key posts in Woodrow Wilson's administration. He did not function in these posts, as recent studies have indicated, merely as an executor of the President's policies.¹ Rather, he possessed ideas concerning Far Eastern affairs that were often quite distinct from Wilson's. Lansing sought the President's approval of his ideas, but when approval was not forthcoming, he sought to implement his ideas through independent action. American relations with China and Japan were affected by the fact that Wilson and Lansing sometimes worked at cross purposes.

Lansing began to deal with Far Eastern problems shortly after he was appointed Counselor. In August, 1914, the Wilson administration embarked upon what developed into a sustained effort to prevent Japan's taking advantage of war in Europe to extend her control over China. As the Secretary of State's principal adviser, Lansing was responsible for planning American action with respect to Japan's invasion of Shantung Province and her Twenty-one Demands on China.² Out of his work with these problems he developed a proposal for striking a bargain on all outstanding questions between the United States and Japan. An understanding of the proposed bargain is important because Lansing's actions were guided by its terms until at least the latter part of 1917.

The idea of a bargain with Japan had its origin in assumptions which Lansing made about the nature of American interests in Japan and China. Lansing, like many informed Americans of his time, believed that the American economy was maturing; that American prosperity would

¹ Roy W. Curry, "Woodrow Wilson and the Far East" (doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1951); Tien-yi Li, *Woodrow Wilson's China Policy, 1913-1917* (New York, 1952); Russel H. Fifield, *Woodrow Wilson and the Far East: The Diplomacy of the Shantung Question* (New York, 1952) are significant studies centering on the President.

² A detailed account of Lansing's role in these episodes is given in Burton F. Beers, "Robert Lansing and the Far East, 1914-1917" (doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1956) 19-86.

soon depend upon the export of vast quantities of agricultural commodities, manufactured products, and surplus capital. In both Japan and China he saw markets of potential value. Japan's expanding industries required increasing quantities of imported raw materials. The Chinese had embarked upon an effort to modernize their country in every respect. For this they needed foreign products, capital, and technical assistance. The traditional friendship of the United States for China suggested that the Chinese would look to America for these things.

The war in Europe promised to speed the realization of these commercial opportunities. Japanese manufacturing was stimulated by the withdrawal of European competitors from world markets. In China there was the prospect that France, Great Britain, and Russia would admit Americans to their spheres of influence. These European powers, engrossed in fighting, were not in a position to meet China's requirements for manufactured products and capital investments; nor were they likely to be in such a position for several years. Thus they would be compelled to open their spheres to either the Americans or the Japanese. It would be the Americans who would enter this new open door. The record showed that the United States had no political aspirations in China and that Japan had definite aspirations.⁸

Lansing believed that the safeguarding of this expanding commercial relationship was of prime importance to the United States. For this reason he was disturbed by tensions that had developed between the United States and Japan since the end of the Russo-Japanese War. These tensions posed a danger to American interests. Japan's geographic position and growing economic and military strength gave her the means, if she chose to use them, to interfere with American trade. In Lansing's opinion this danger could be avoided by making a settlement on all issues between the two countries.

Three problems had contributed to the build-up of tension. Of great concern to Japan was the fact that the United States, alone among the powers, refused to recognize the existence of a Japanese sphere of influence in South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia and had exerted economic and diplomatic pressure to drive Japan from these areas. Japanese leaders, who were convinced that the spheres were necessary to their country's development, regarded these acts as indications of an unfriendly attitude toward Japan's national aspirations. The American

⁸ Lansing Memorandum, Aug. 15, 1914, State Department Records, National Archives, File No. 763.72111/54½. (Hereafter cited as SDR.)

⁹ For a sample of this resentment, see a summary of officially inspired comments in the Japanese press, "Japan's Fears of a Sino-American Alliance," *The Literary Digest*, XLIX (29:1), 144.

government, on the other hand, had been irked by what it considered to be deliberate Japanese attempts to exclude American trade from South Manchuria. The most recent example of this was a revision in freight rates on the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway which would discriminate against American merchandise. The United States maintained that such steps were violations of the pledges contained in Japan's response to John Hay's first "Open Door" notes.⁵ The final source of friction involved discriminatory treatment of Japanese immigrants by the California state government. In 1913 the California legislature enacted a law prohibiting the sale of agricultural land to Japanese. Japan responded to this act with official protests and anti-American demonstrations by her people. The American government was concerned by the offense to Japanese sensibilities but was unable to resolve the matter in a manner that was satisfactory to Japan.⁶

Lansing proposed that these difficulties be resolved along the following lines. The United States would recognize publicly and explicitly Japan's "special interests" in Eastern Inner Mongolia, South Manchuria, and Shantung Province. In return Japan would (1) give specific pledges to prohibit discriminatory acts against foreign commerce in areas where her "special interests" were recognized and (2) agree to make no further complaint with regard to alien land legislation in the United States unless such legislation were confiscatory in nature or affected vested interests.⁷

The proposal to recognize Japan's "special interests" was not in accord with President Wilson's announced determination to defend China's administrative and territorial integrity.⁸ Lansing was conscious of this but recommended the step as wise policy. He believed profoundly that economic and strategic considerations made it necessary for a great power to maintain a measure of control over areas adjacent to its borders. The

⁵ Paul H. Clyde, "An Episode in American-Japanese Relations: The Manchurian Freight Rates Controversy," *Far Eastern Review*, XXVI (1930), 410-412, 480-482, provides the best published account of the American position.

⁶ Thomas A. Bailey, "California, Japan, and the Alien Land Legislation of 1913," *Pacific Historical Review*, I (1932), 36-59. Curry, "Wilson and the Far East," 102-139, presents the clearest statement of the President's views.

⁷ Lansing to William Jennings Bryan, March 1, 1915, United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914-1920* (2 vols., Washington, 1939-1940), II, 408 (hereafter cited as Lansing Papers); Edward T. Williams (Chief, Far Eastern Division) to Bryan, Feb. 26, 1915, William Jennings Bryan Papers (hereafter cited as Bryan Papers), Library of Congress, Letterbook, Dec. 1, 1914-June 8, 1915. The ideas expressed in the Williams memorandum are Lansing's. Williams wrote after holding conferences with Lansing. The views that Williams expressed were not typical of his thinking either before or after these conferences.

⁸ Statements of Wilson's aims are given in Curry, "Wilson and the Far East," 93-101; Tien-yi Li, *Wilson's China Policy*, 5, 12.

United States, for example, exercised hegemony over the Caribbean region. In view of this it appeared that the American government should admit that there was a sound basis for Japanese claims.⁹ Furthermore, Lansing doubted that the United States could destroy the Japanese spheres of influence. Japan regarded Eastern Inner Mongolia, South Manchuria, and Shantung as vital to her interests. She was prepared to exert every effort to maintain her claims in those areas. The American government was unable to consider the use of armed force against the spheres. The failure of diplomatic offensives, such as Secretary Philander Knox's Neutralization Proposal of 1909, suggested that peaceful measures were unlikely to have any practical effect on Japan's claims. Indeed, a diplomatic offensive seemed more likely to precipitate the expansion of Japanese claims than to have any other result. The State Department had received warnings in 1914 that a challenge to Japan's position in South Manchuria or Shantung would probably provoke the flooding of China with Japanese troops.¹⁰ Thus the United States would gain nothing and risk much if it included the Japanese spheres of influence in its effort to defend China's integrity. For this reason it seemed expedient to recognize Japan's claims and ask for Japanese concessions in other matters.¹¹

The request for pledges with respect to foreign commerce in Japanese spheres of influence was intended to erect legal safeguards for American trade. When Japan replied to the Hay notes in 1899, she did not claim "special interests" in Eastern Inner Mongolia, South Manchuria, or Shantung. Therefore, it was questionable whether her pledges applied in those areas. Moreover, Japan's pledges were conditioned upon the acceptance by other powers of Hay's notes. Such acceptances had not been forthcoming. These factors made it difficult for the American government to obtain redress in controversies such as the one that had developed over freight rates. Lansing's proposal was intended to remedy the defects in the American case.¹²

⁹ Lansing's views on the American position in the Caribbean are to be found in Winfried H. Giffcott, *The Caribbean Policy of the United States, 1890-1920* (Baltimore, 1942), Chapters VII-VIII; Dexter Perkins, *Hands Off, A History of the Monroe Doctrine* (Boston, 1941), 266-269; J. Fred Rippy, *The Caribbean Danger Zone* (New York, 1940), 181-182; Charles C. Tansill, *The Purchase of the Danish West Indies* (Baltimore, 1932), Chapter VIII. For evidence that Lansing regarded Japan's position in Manchuria as being similar to that of the United States in the Caribbean see his memorandum of Sept. 26, 1917, SDP No. 79394/594½.

¹⁰ John V. A. MacMurray (Charge d'Affaires, Peking Legation) to Bryan, Sept. 10, 1914, United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914, Supplement* (Washington, 1928), 186. (Hereafter cited as *For. Rel.*)

¹¹ Lansing to Bryan, March 1, 1915, Lansing Papers, 1:498.

¹² *Ibid.*

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The suggestion that Japan acquiesce to American land legislation differed from earlier proposals to solve this question. Wilson and Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan had discussed the negotiation of a treaty barring discriminatory treatment of Japanese living in the United States. The treaty would have nullified conflicting state legislation.¹³ Lansing, however, doubted that this solution accorded with the national interest. Nullification of the land law would encourage large numbers of Japanese to remain in California, where they might become a dangerous fifth column in the event that the United States became involved in war with Japan. Lansing hoped to eliminate this danger by inducing the Japanese to disperse throughout the country. If the California law were to remain in force, it might accomplish this purpose.¹⁴

Lansing believed that Japan would accept his bargain. In 1912 the Japanese Foreign Minister, Yasuya Uchida, had made a similar proposal to Secretary Knox while the latter was on a tour of Japan.¹⁵ More recently (February, 1915) Premier Count Shigenobu Okuma had made a speech before the Diet which indicated a willingness to compromise with the United States.¹⁶ In any event Lansing did not think that any harm would result from making such a proposal to Japan. He told Bryan:

We would certainly be no worse off than we were before; and I think . . . we would be in a far better position to discuss Japan's conduct when a more propitious time comes to take up with the other interested powers the question of the "open door" and the respective rights of the powers secured through the application of that principle.¹⁷

Lansing presented his proposed bargain to Wilson and Bryan early in March, 1915, while the latter were considering the steps to be taken by the United States with respect to Japan's Twenty-one Demands on China. The President and Secretary approved the idea of recognizing Japan's "special interests" but did not think the time was appropriate to raise the freight rates controversy or land legislation questions. Thus, in a note dated March 13, 1915, which expressed the American view of the Twenty-One Demands, the United States protested against only those

¹³ Bryan to Wilson, Jan. 23, 1915; Wilson to Bryan, Jan. 27, 1915, Bryan Papers, Letterbook, Dec. 1, 1914-June 8, 1915.

¹⁴ Lansing's views are reflected in Eugene Wambaugh to Lansing, Memoranda No. 38, 39, Sept. 21, 1914. Lansing to Wambaugh, May 11, 1916, SDF 763.72111/5251/2.

¹⁵ Williams to Bryan, Feb. 26, 1915, Bryan Papers, Letterbook, Dec. 1, 1914-June 8, 1915. These were not the first indications of Japan's willingness to make such a settlement. Secretary of State Philander Knox, writing to Theodore Roosevelt in 1910, stated that Japan had recently tried to connect the California and South Manchurian questions. Tyler Dennett, *Roosevelt and the Russo-Japanese War* (Garden City, 1925), 321.

¹⁶ George Guthrie (Ambassador to Japan) to Bryan, Feb. 15, 1915, SDF No. 811.52/277.

¹⁷ Lansing to Bryan, Mar. 1, 1915, Lansing Papers, II, 408.

demands that affected areas of China outside of the established Japanese spheres of influence. The American Government, the note stated, was aware that certain demands relating to Shantung, South Manchuria, and Eastern Inner Mongolia violated China's integrity, the principle of equal opportunity, and American treaty rights. However, the United States would not object to these demands, because it "... frankly recognizes that territorial contiguity creates special relations between Japan and these districts."¹⁹

But Wilson did not remain convinced that Lansing's suggestion was sound. Japan continued to press China for acceptance of the full list of demands. This persuaded Wilson that Japan was determined to seize all of China. Ever solicitous for China's welfare, the President was determined that the United States should not be associated with such an act. On April 14, 1915, he instructed Bryan to be "as active as the circumstances permit in showing ourselves to be champions of the sovereign rights of China, now as always, though with no thought of seeking any special advantage for ourselves."²⁰ From this time forward Wilson was unwilling to consider any deal which involved American recognition of Japan's "special interests" in Chinese territory.²¹

Lansing did not concur with the President's determination. Indeed, in the summer of 1915 he found another reason for striking his bargain with Japan. The State Department received information that Japan might drop out of the war against Germany and make an alliance with that country.²² Lansing regarded the prospect with the utmost concern. He was by that time certain that the United States would eventually enter the war on the side of England and France.²³ If Germany and Japan

¹⁹ Bryan to Wilson, Mar. 6, 1915, Bryan Papers, Letterbook, Dec. 1, 1914-June 3, 1915, indicates that Lansing drafted the Mar. 13 note to Japan. The analysis of the Mar. 13 note given above is drawn from Paul H. Clyde, "The Open Door in Relation to the Twenty-one Demands," *Pacific Affairs*, III (1920), 836-841. The text of the American note is printed in *For. Rel.* 1915 (Washington, 1924), 105-108.

²⁰ Wilson to Bryan, Lansing Papers, II, 416-417.

²¹ Curry, "Wilson and the Far East," 617-619, provides the best account of the President's motives for reversing his stand.

²² The suspicion that Japan and Germany were moving toward a reconciliation was based on fragmentary evidence. It was learned that a representative of the Austrian government had approached the Japanese Ambassador in Sweden with a proposal to make peace. Bryan to Wilson, Apr. 26, 1915, William Jennings Bryan Papers, National Archives. American intelligence reported a large number of cable messages between Germany and Japan. Foreign observers in Japan noted a decline in popular enthusiasm for war after the fall of Kiaochow and the appearance of pro-German sentiment in some quarters. Frank L. Polk Memorandum, (Counselor, State Department), Dec. 15, 1915, Frank L. Polk Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. Two years later Japan admitted that she had received peace overtures from Germany but denied having given serious consideration to them. Lansing Memorandum, Sept. 6, 1917, Lansing Papers, II, 135.

²³ Robert Lansing, *War Memoirs of Robert Lansing* (New York, 1935), 19-21.

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had reached an understanding when this occurred, the likelihood of trouble developing between the United States and Japan would be greatly increased. The United States could not afford to divide its attention between Europe and the Far East. Therefore, it was desirable to eliminate difficulties with Japan as quickly as possible.²³

While Lansing remained constant in his desire to make a settlement, two changes were notable in the handling of his proposal after the crisis of the Twenty-one Demands. In the first place, he modified the terms of the proposal by dropping Shantung as an area in which the United States would recognize Japan's "special interests." Secondly, he ceased to advocate to his colleagues in the Wilson administration the striking of the bargain but utilized indirect methods to gain the adoption of his ideas.

Lansing's decision to reverse his position on Shantung followed an American firm's acquisition of an interest in a flood control project in eastern China. Before work could proceed it was necessary for the United States to defeat Japanese pretensions to exclusive development privileges in Shantung, where part of the work was to be conducted. Several considerations prompted Lansing, then Secretary of State, to give the project vigorous diplomatic support: successful completion of the project would undoubtedly clear the way for other investments of value to Americans; Britain and France, which were growing fearful of Japanese encroachment on their interests, would probably cooperate with the United States, thus making it likely that the campaign would succeed; and finally, Japan no longer seemed ready to react to a challenge to her "special interests" by flooding China with troops.²⁴

The reasons for Lansing's failure to urge his colleagues to adopt his ideas are suggested by the working relationship that developed between Lansing and Wilson. After entering the State Department Lansing made a point of analyzing the President's personality and the way he worked. For example, Lansing ascertained that Wilson would accept advice on a

²³ The importance that Lansing attached to the elimination of friction with Japan can be gauged by the following incident. Following the outbreak of World War I, the Japanese press expressed increasing resentment over American control of the Philippines. Lansing feared that Japan might attack the islands and precipitate a war with the United States. Early in 1917 he proposed to Colonel Edward House that the United States sell the islands to Japan. The proposal was not considered seriously by the President, but the fact that Lansing made it indicates the extent to which he was prepared to go to keep the United States out of trouble in the Pacific. House Diary, Apr. 10, 1917, Edward M. House Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

²⁴ For Lansing's support of the flood control project see Lansing to Paul S. Reinsch, Nov. 6, 1916, *For. Rel.*, 1916 (Washington, 1925), 129. A full discussion of Lansing's role in the project is in Beers, "Lansing and the Far East, 1914-1917," 131-185.

problem until he was ready to make a decision. When the decision was made, Wilson considered the matter closed and refused to listen to further argument. Lansing, therefore, seldom urged the President to reverse a decision. He felt that to take such action would accomplish no good purpose. Wilson was unlikely to change his mind and was likely to become irritated. Thus Lansing strove loyally to carry out the President's policies, or to change them, if he could, by indirection.³⁶ Evidence that Lansing followed the latter line of procedure with his proposed bargain is to be found in his reaction to a scheme to inaugurate an American investments program in South Manchuria and his effort to inject his ideas into the conversations with Viscount Kikujiro Ishii late in 1917.

On January 3, 1917, the American Minister in Peking, Paul S. Reinsch, without consulting the State Department, proposed to his Japanese colleague that American and Japanese firms cooperate in the construction of a railway in South Manchuria. This bold stroke was intended to make clear to Japan that the United States did not recognize the Japanese claims to "special interest" in Manchuria. Reinsch did not consult in advance with his superiors because he believed that he was acting in accord with the President's determination to defend the administrative and territorial integrity of China.³⁷

Reinsch's project was not supported by Lansing, however. Discussing the matter with the Japanese Ambassador on January 23, Lansing denied that Reinsch's proposal had originated in Washington and said further: "... that the Ambassador must surely be well aware that the American Government recognized that Japan had special interests in Manchuria. Although no declaration to that effect had been made by the United States [sic] yet this Government had repeatedly shown a practical recognition of the fact and did not desire to do anything there to interfere with Japan's interests."

Later in the conversation Lansing called the Ambassador's attention to the difference in America's attitude to Manchuria, where Japan's "special interests were conceded and Shantung, where no such special interest was recognized."³⁸ Lansing had a dual purpose in making these

³⁶ There is much evidence to indicate that Lansing observed closely the President's working habits and temperament. See the sketch of Lansing in Lansing's *The Big Four at the Peace Conference* (Boston, 1921); his *War Memoirs* (New York, 1925); and his memorandum, "The Personality of Woodrow Wilson," Robert Lansing Memoranda, Wilson's biographer, Professor Arthur S. Link, notes that the latter description is "the most illuminating that this writer has read." *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York, 1954), 169.

³⁷ Reinsch to Lansing, *For. Rel.*, 1917 (Washington, 1917), 169.

³⁸ Lansing Memorandum, *For. Rel.*, 1917, 169.

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statements. He sought to quiet Japanese apprehensions that the United States would attempt to drive Japan from China. He suggested that the American government would consider a compromise on the issues dividing the United States and Japan, if the latter cared to make such a proposal. Presumably Lansing believed that Wilson would find it more difficult to reject a suggestion that came from Japan than one that originated from his own adviser.

Japan did not wait long to take advantage of the opening Lansing had provided. In May she requested permission to send a special emissary to the United States.²⁸ A month later she informed the State Department of the terms she was willing to make. This information was conveyed in a conversation between the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and an official of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Foreign Minister stated that his government would give specific guarantees not to seek special privileges in China proper or to interfere in domestic politics there in return for American recognition of Japan's "special interests" in South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, should such recognition be granted, Japan would not raise the question of the treatment of Japanese in the United States.²⁹ Here was concrete evidence that Japan would strike a bargain with the United States. Lansing's major task now was to obtain the President's approval of the deal.

Colonel Edward M. House, the President's most intimate friend and adviser, was asked by Lansing to undertake this task. House complied with the request and wrote to Wilson a few days after the Lansing-Ishii conversations had begun. He outlined the bargain that Japan was willing to make. He urged that it be approved because it would eliminate the prospect of serious trouble. At the same time it would not adversely affect Wilson's determination to aid China. South Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia were dependent areas which were not vital to China's welfare. Therefore, no harm would result if they were not included in the defense of China's integrity.³⁰ But this reasoning failed to persuade Wilson. He directed that Lansing should secure Japanese renunciation of her "special interests" everywhere in China.³¹ This, Japan

²⁸ Memorandum, May 12, 1917, SDF No. 763.72/4677½.

²⁹ T. Miyaoka to Nicholas Murray Butler, June 12, 1917 [Forwarded by Butler to Lansing], SDF No. 793.94/587½.

³⁰ House to Wilson, Sept. 18, 1917, House Papers. For an earlier indication that House favored Lansing's proposed bargain see House to Lansing, June 27, 1917, House Papers, Lansing File.

³¹ Curry, "Wilson and the Far East," 360.

would not concede. Negotiations were deadlocked. Lansing and Ishii sought escape from the dilemma by incorporating a statement of the conflicting American and Japanese views in notes which bear their names.¹⁰ Thus the settlement for which Lansing had labored so long failed to materialize.

Although Lansing ultimately failed to win approval of his proposed bargain, the effort was not without significance. Lansing formulated independently of Wilson a scheme for settling Far Eastern problems. His conviction that the scheme presented the most feasible solution to these problems was sufficiently strong to prompt him to seek its adoption for more than two years, first openly, then by indirect means. His effort left its imprint on the course of American diplomacy. He drafted the American note that extended recognition of Japan's "special interest" in contiguous areas of the Chinese Empire, blocked a challenge to Japan's sphere of influence in South Manchuria and encouraged the Japanese to open negotiation with the United States by suggesting that concessions would be made to Japan's aspirations in China. These activities were not in full accord with Wilson's announced determination to champion China's welfare. This evidence suggests that historians seeking an understanding of American Far Eastern relations during the Wilson administration should examine closely the ideas and actions of Lansing as well as those of the President.

¹⁰ A. Whitney Griswold, *The Far Eastern Policy of the United States* (New York, 1938), 218-219.